

Bronx panorama adorns White House Christmas tree

By Kate Pastor
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Local artist Daniel Hauben has never been one for painting in red, white and blue or decorating symbols of national import.

He's more likely to be found standing in front of his easel in the parking lot behind the Target store on West 225th Street, or painting the street life on Fordham Road and the Grand Concourse, than hobnobbing with the Washington elite.

But his love of the Bronx as a sub-

ject for his paintings caught the eye of Congressman Eliot Engel, who chose the artist to represent the 17th District by creating an ornament for the 2008 White House Christmas Tree. It now hangs on the 20-foot-tall indoor tree in the Blue Room.

"The whole idea of patriotic art or something like that is not a concept with which I have ever worked," said Mr. Hauben, so he set out to tackle the commission in his own style.

He ignored Laura Bush's theme of red, white and blue for the trees' ornaments, choosing, instead, just to pay

homage to his native borough.

"The Bronx Is In The House" is how he announced the honor in a press release, and the ornament he created was modeled after an earlier painting of his, of the view from behind Target — one of his favorite Bronx locales, overlooking the elevated train tracks, the tops of buildings with their protruding smokestacks, the Harlem River and its bridges, the Manhattan skyline, the trees and the Gould Memorial Library dome on the Bronx Community College Campus.

The Bronx terrain, a mix of urban

and pastoral elements that Mr. Hauben finds hard to resist, is often misunderstood, he said, and making the ornament was an opportunity give the beauty of the borough a place on a national stage.

Mr. Hauben remembers that when he was a student at the School for Visual Arts he painted a Bronx scene and his teacher interpreted his painting as being infused with a fictional pastoral quality.

He thought: "Haven't these people
(Continued on page B9)

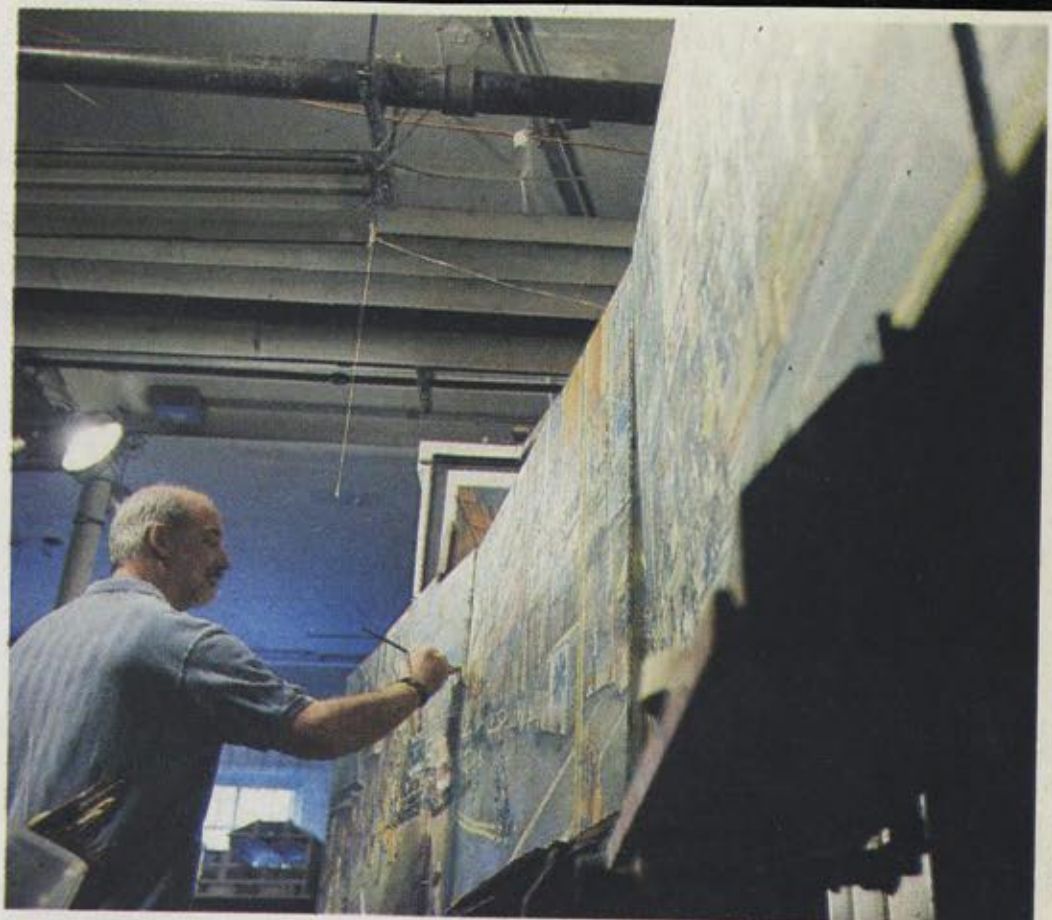


Photo by Claudio Papapietro

DANIEL HAUBEN is hard at work on a Bronx streetscape in his Riverdale studio.

Bronx panorama adorns White House holiday tree

(Continued from page A1)
been past 96th Street?"

Over the years, he has captured the diversity of the Bronx landscape in scores of oil paintings and so it followed naturally that when he was asked to represent the Bronx in Washington, he would do the same. "I just painted what I thought would be representative of our district — which is what I would do anyway," he said. That was the only White House requirement he followed.

The plastic ornament, with a shiny chrome veneer, was delivered to him through the mail in August along with "... a page of requirements none of which I paid any attention to," he said. "They chose an artist. Then what are they gonna tell you? What to do? What kind of art to make?"

Mr. Hauben had no qualms about voicing his displeasure

Daniel Hauben had no desire to attend the White House tree-lighting ceremony, but he was happy to have the chance to contribute to the occasion.

with the current residents at 1600 Pennsylvania Ave., and no desire to attend the White House tree-lighting ceremony on Dec. 2, but he was happy for the chance to contribute to the occasion.

"... I felt like how many images of the Bronx have ever hung in the White House? It's

probably the first," he said.

So from his Riverdale studio in Dogwood Close, a meter-room-turned workspace he rents for a steal, he first reduced the ball's shine and then brought out the tiniest brushes in his collection. He established a routine of painting a side, pausing to let it dry and then rotating the ball to paint the next segment.

The process mirrored his experience as he worked on his original study for the work en-plein-air in the Target parking lot. Each time the sun set, he would have to go home and wait until dawn broke again.

Mr. Hauben is the borough's most prolific painter of street scenes and cityscapes and is an eight-time winner of the Bronx Recognizes Its Own Award from the Bronx Council on the Arts.